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## THE BABYLONIAN ACCOUNT OF CREATION.

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*Babylonian conception of the universe.—Account of the creation, tablets I.—III.—Marduk's combat with Tiamat, tablet IV.—Creation of constellations, stars and moon, tablet V.—Animals, tablet VI.—The Cuthean and the non-Semitic account of creation.*

The ordinary Babylonian conceived the earth as round and immovable, a lofty mountain, resting on the abyss of the waters. Above the earth, stretched the arch of the sky, the heaven of God *Anu*, the father of the gods, resting on the foundation of heaven, the horizon. Above this firmament again is the inner part of heaven, the abode of the gods, called the "sunlit house," because here the sun shone continually. Between the visible heaven and the inner part of heaven were the upper waters, an heavenly ocean.

At both north poles, that of the ecliptic as well as that of the equator, sat the astronomical *Anu* and *Bêl*. Below, in the furthest south, perhaps the constellation of Argo, the astronomical *Ea*.

The sky was divided by "ways" or "paths" of the movable stars, one of them being the ecliptic (or *Anu*-path); another, the Tropic of Cancer (the *Bêl*-path), and a third, the Tropic of Capricorn (the *Ea*-path). On either side of the world, to the east and to the west, there were doors, through which the sun passed on his daily circuit; but it does not follow that the Babylonian poets, who wrote the accounts of the creation and other cosmogonic and epic poems, believed in the existence of such doors, as little as we believe the earth to be fixed and stationary, because we may say that the sun rises or sets.

In the sky there are four classes of heavenly bodies: I, The

<sup>1</sup> Compare the writer's article in *Hebraica*, Vol. IX. pp. 6-23.

fixed stars ; 2, the planets, called the moving or retreating sheep ; 3, the comets, called the raven stars ; and 4, the meteors. Of special importance, among the fixed stars, are the stars of the ecliptic and the zodiacal signs which, Babylonian in their origin, were largely borrowed by the Greeks and other nations.

In the pre-Semitic period of Chaldæa, the earth was divided into seven parallel zones encircling one another and divided by dykes or mounds ; this conception was modified by the Semitic invaders, who substituted for it the division of the earth into four equal quadrants.

Toward the east was situated the "bright mountain," the great mountain of sunrise ; in the west the "dark mountain," the mountain of sunset. Mysterious is the north of the earth. Beneath the mountain of the east is found the "splendid chamber," the hall of fate, which again is a part of the assembly room of the gods, where they gather at new year, under the presidency of *Marduk* (Merodach), to determine the lot for king and country. Between heaven and earth, toward east and west, are the waters of the east and the waters of the west, which, like the ocean in the south, pass over into the primeval sea, surrounding the earth as an enclosure.

The "island of the blessed" is located on the southern horizon of the Persian gulf. Beneath the earth lay Hades, the realm of the dead, its entrance toward the west. An ancient myth asserts that it is surrounded by seven walls and approached through seven gates, which serve as a counterpart to the seven zones of the earth. This fact shows that the myth describing the descent of the goddess *Ishtar* to Hades must be very old. Beneath, the earth is hollow ; in this cavity and below it are the waters of the world-ocean.

Such must have been the conception of the old Babylonian poet who composed the long epic poem, describing the creation of the world in a series of tablets or books, and other lays of similar character. The tablets appear to be seven in number, and since the creation was described as consisting of a series of successive acts, it presented a curious similarity to the account of the creation records in Genesis, chapter I.

The epic in its present form belongs to a late date. Theology had become philosophic materialism. A good deal of the poem is put into the mouth of *Marduk*, the supreme god of the Babylonians, in whose honor probably this account of the creation was written during the reign of Asurbanipal, king of Assyria, (B.C. 668–626), the *Asnapper* of Ezra 4 : 10. The first tablet, however, expresses the cosmological doctrine of the author's own day. Only the beginning of this tablet has been recovered, which informs us that :

Time was when, what is above, was not yet called heaven,  
 The below, earth was not yet named —  
 The Ocean, the primeval, their progenitor [and]  
 Mother *Tiamat* the bearer of them all,  
 5 Their waters [still] were gathered together  
   [i. e., there was one mass of water];—  
 Field was not yet harvested, yea not even dry-land was to be seen,  
 Time was when none of the gods shone forth,  
   Not yet was any name called on [in worship] nor yet did any one  
     determine the destiny.  
 [At last] were created the gods . . . .  
 10 *Lachmu* and *Lachamu* then shone forth, [were recognized and worshiped].  
 And they brought forth (generated) . . . . AN-SAR (and) AN KI-SAR  
   were created.  
 [perhaps=the upper and the lower firmaments].  
 A long time elapsed . . . .  
 [ere] god *Anu* [*Bēl* and *Ea* were made].  
 AN-SAR and KI-SAR [created them?].

Before the other gods could find a suitable habitation for themselves and their creation, it appears to have been necessary to destroy, to a great extent, the earlier creation, recorded in tablet I., which had been the work of chaos; the destruction of it by the younger gods of light and order ushered in the new creation of the visible world. Light and darkness, chaos and order, are ever struggling one against another. The victory of light and order is described in the succeeding tablets in the fight between *Bēl*-Merodach (*Marduk*) the principle of light, and *Tiamat*, the principle of darkness, represented as the dragon, the wicked serpent, the *Tōhū*, the chaos of Gen. 1 : 2. The thought expressed in tablet I. perhaps was that : “In the very beginning

there were created, out of chaos and the primeval ocean, the great gods ; but as for the rest of the created world, chaos continued to rule." *Marduk* belonged to the younger gods, and in the Babylonian pantheon he was the powerful among the gods, the leader of heaven and earth. Originally he was the god of the early morning sun, and at the same time the god of the sun in spring-time. No wonder that to him the Babylonian poets, the authors of the other tablets, describing the creation, attributed the main part in the fight against the principle of darkness, still pervading the universe according to the first tablet. Indeed chaos moved upon the face of the waters.

The second tablet, according to some fragments preserved, was occupied with an account of the preparations made to insure the victory of *Marduk* over *Tiamat*, of light over darkness, and order over anarchy. "Let there be light, and there was light."

This fragment of tablet II., at its close, gives, according to the custom of Babylonian scribes, the first line of tablet III., *AN-SAR* opened his mouth and spake." Four or five fragments in the British Museum constitute the known remains of this precious document. They have never been published in such a shape that a critical study of its contents could be based upon it. Parts of the text are found in Fd. Delitzsch's *Assyrisches Wörterbuch*, p. 100, and in an article by Theo. G. Pinches in the fourth volume of the "Babylonian and Oriental Record," pp. 26 foll. The lines contain the acceptance by the gods of *Marduk's* offer to capture *Tiamat*.

The fourth tablet is represented by two long fragments. The one is part of an Assyrian tablet, forming the middle of the story (49 + 36 lines) ; the other, from Borsippa, is part of a Babylonian tablet. By putting the texts together, we may get a tolerably complete account in 146 lines, They read as follows :

1. And they (the gods) put him (*Marduk*) in a royal palace ;  
Under the protection of his father he dwelt (lived) in (his) kingdom.

These seem to be the last two lines of the third tablet, the fourth opening with a eulogy of *Marduk* by the poet or priest :

3. Yea, thou art glorious among the great gods.  
Thy work is unequalled, thy command is (the command of) *Anu*.

5. O *Marduk*, thou art glorious, indeed, among the great gods.  
 Thy work is unequalled, thy command is (the command of) *Anu*.

These two lines may have constituted a response on the part of the congregation or hearers of the eulogy, contained in this fourth tablet. Then the poet continues :

- From to-day thy command shall be unalterable.  
 To exalt and to humble be in thy power.  
 Verily, thy word be firm, be thy command not resisted.
10. None among the gods has surpassed thy power,  
 (Though with) decorations be filled the shrine of the(se) gods.  
 The place of their gathering may it now be established in thy place,  
 (where they will say unto thee) :
- “O *Marduk*, thou art, indeed, he who has become our avenger (against *Tiamat*) ;  
 We have given thee the kingdom, the rule of the whole universe.”
15. When thou art in the assembly (of the gods), may thy will prevail  
 against all.  
 Thy weapons may never be broken, may thy enemies tremble.  
 O Lord, spare thou the life of him that trusteth in thee.  
 But the god that is wedded to evil, pour out his life's blood.
- (After this prayer, the poets give a description of *Marduk's* divine power):
- (His) word (command) they set up in their midst as unique (*i. e.*, all-important)
- Unto *Marduk*, their first-born, they spake :
20. Thy work, O Lord, be greater than that of the (other) gods ;  
 To destroy and to create, speak and it shall done.  
 Open thy mouth, and his (perhaps the evil god's) word shall vanish away.  
 (*i. e.*, be made powerless).  
 Speak then again to him and his word shall be restored.”
25. He (*Marduk*) spake, and in his mouth (*i. e.*, that of the god who doeth evil) was destroyed his (power of) speech.  
 Again he spake unto him and his speech was restored unto him (literally “created”).  
 When the gods, his fathers, saw the effect of his (*Marduk's*) word,  
 They rejoiced greeting him : “ *Marduk* indeed be (our) king ” !  
 They invested him with the scepter, the throne, and the reign ;
30. A weapon unsurpassed they gave him, consuming the enemy.  
 “Go now (they said unto him) and cut asunder the life-thread of *Tiamat* ;  
 May the winds carry her blood to secret places” (*i. e.*, far away.)  
 The gods, his fathers, fixed the fate of the lord (*Marduk*).

- They led him the road to safety and success.
35. A bow he made himself and took it for his weapon,  
The falchion he swung that he had made of (the wood) of the terebinth(?).  
The god took up the weapon, seized it with his right hand,  
The bow and the quiver at his side he hung ;  
A lightning he caused to go before him,
40. With destructive (fierce) wrath he filled his bowels.  
A net he made to enclose *Kirbish-Tiamat*.  
The four winds he seized, so that she could by no means escape,  
The wind from the south (and) the north, the east (and) the west.  
Then he brought to her (*Tiamat's*) side the net, the present of his father, *Anu*.
45. He created the destructive wind, the evil wind, the storm, and the hurricane ;  
The four winds, the seven winds, the whirlwind, the wind whose equal does not exist.  
He caused the winds, he had created, to issue forth, even the seven of them,  
To work the destruction of *Kirbish-Tiamat*, to storm behind her ;  
And the lord raised his mighty weapon, the hurricane.  
The chariot, something unequalled, the terrible, he mounted ;  
He harnessed it and hung the four reins over the side (*i. e.*, of the chariot, in order to have his hands free).  
The weapon, the relentless, the overwhelming, the swift,  
[to fight those ?] whose fangs carry poison.  
(meaning the fangs of the dragons, the host of *Tiamat*.)  
. . . . . they know how to overthrow.
55. . . . . terrible [was] the battle.
- (Lines 56–58 are too mutilated to permit a connected translation).
59. He took to his way and caused [her] pursuit ;  
60. To the place of *Tiamat* he turned (his face).  
With her lips she cried out aloud ;  
When fright [befell her], she seized his fist.  
In that day they beheld him, the gods beheld him ;  
The gods, his fathers, beheld him, the gods beheld him.
65. The lord approached for the fight, *Tiamat* he saw.  
Of *Kingu*, her husband, he sought his overthrow.  
When he (*Kingu*) beheld him, his reason became disturbed,  
His mind distracted, his actions confused.  
And the gods, his helpers, walking at his side,  
70. Saw [how] the first-born bore their yoke (*i. e.*, exposed himself to dangers for their sake),

- [Knowing?] that *Tiamat* did not turn her neck (*i. e.*, did not turn to flight)  
 But with her lips cried out an abundance of evil, (and they said :)  
 "Around thee, O lord of the gods, cometh her host,  
 Their throng they gather, where thou art."  
 75. But the lord lifted up the hurricane, his mighty weapon,  
 Against *Kirbish-Tiamat*, on whom he takes vengeance he hurled it, saying :  
 "[As thou didst excite rebellion on high,  
 Now gather courage and give resistance."

The following lines, 79-83, are too mutilated to admit a connected translation. All that can be made out, indicates, however, the continuation of *Marduk's* speech to *Tiamat*.

l. 80 *b*, "thou didst hate"; 81 *b*, "to thy husband"; 82 *b*, "thou didst resist the divine command"; 83 *b*, "evil things thou didst seek after."

Here ends the obverse of this important tablet, the reverse continues the account as follows :

1. "As thou didst direct thy evil deed against my fathers,  
 Therefore may be tied down thy army, and thy weapons may they be bound  
 (*i. e.*, made harmless).  
 Stand ! and I and thou will fight together."  
 (Thus far the speech of *Marduk* to *Tiamat*).  
 But *Tiamat* upon hearing this,
5. Considered herself defeated and lost her balance of mind.  
 She roared wildly (and) loud ;  
 Completely her inside burst into two parts.  
 Magic words she spake and applied her (?) incantation.  
 They, then, made their weapons appeal to the gods of battle.
10. They approached each other, *Tiamat* and the leader of the gods, *Marduk*.  
 To the fight they rushed against one another, they approached for the battle.  
 But the lord spread out his net, to enclose her ;  
 An evil wind, to seize her from behind, he let loose before him ;  
 Then opened her mouth *Tiamat* to crush it (*i. e.*, to swallow the evil wind).
15. But he *Marduk* caused the evil wind to enter (her mouth) so that she  
 could not shut her lips.  
 The strong winds filled her stomach,  
 So that her heart sank (*i. e.*, she lost courage) ; wide opened he her mouth,  
 He grasped his falchion and pierced (split open) her stomach ;  
 Her entrails he tore out, cut out (her) heart.
20. He grasped her and destroyed her life.  
 Her corpse he threw down, upon it he placed himself.  
 After *Tiamat*, the leader had been killed,



- Her host was broken up, her throng was scattered,  
And the gods her helpers, going at her side,  
25. Trembled, feared, and retreated backward.  
He (*Marduk*) let them escape and spared their life;  
With a cordon they were surrounded which no one can escape;  
He enclosed them and their weapons he broke.  
They were placed (like birds) in a net; they sat down in utter prostration.
30. And the world (literally: the regions) they filled with their wailing.  
They bore his punishment, they were kept in bondage,  
And the eleven creatures were filled with fear.  
. . . . .  
He put their hands in bonds,
35. And their opposition beneath himself he trod.  
And *Kingu* who against [*Marduk* had been] their [leader?],  
He bound him; with the bound gods he counted him.  
He took away from him the tablets of fate.  
With his seal he doomed him (literally: he sealed him), his breast (?) he seized.
40. After he had bound his enemy,  
And crushed the proud foe completely,  
He fully established the superiority of *AN-SAR* over the enemy.  
*Marduk*, the mighty, had thus accomplished the intention of god *Ea*.  
Over the gods in bondage he strengthened the guard.
45. Toward *Tiamat*, then, whom he had overcome, he turned back,  
And the lord trampled on the lower part of *Tiamat's* body.  
With his unmerciful club he smote her,  
He cut through the veins of her blood;  
The wind, even the wind of the north, he caused it to carry to secret places (*i. e.*, far away).
50. He saw it, his face rejoiced, he gloried.  
A present, a peace offering he caused to be brought to him.  
Then the lord quieted down, seeing her (*Tiamat's*) corpse.  
The foul, rotten flesh he tore away, and he performed wonderful deeds.  
He tore from her like of a fish her skin in (its) two halves.
55. Half of her he stood up, and made it the heavenly dome.  
He pushed (in front of it) a bolt; he stationed a guard;  
And commanded him not to let the waters pour out (too freely?).  
He connected the heaven with the (lower) regions,  
And placed it opposite to the primeval sea, the dwelling of god *Ea*.
60. Then the lord measured off the circui (*i. e.* circuit) of the primeval sea.  
A palace he build like that (*i. e.*, like heaven) namely *E-shar-ra*,  
The palace *E-shar-ra* which he had built as a heavenly dome.  
*Anum*, *Bēl* (and) *Ea* he caused to inhabit it as their habitation.

Here ends the fourth tablet of the Creation-series; immediately upon it follows, according to the custom of the Babylonian scribes, the first line of tablet five :

“ He established the mansions of the great gods.”

Then follows a colophon, which states that there were :

One hundred and forty-six lines of the fourth tablet (of the series entitled “ When on high unproclaimed,” and that it was written by *Na'id-Merodach* in honor of *Nebo* his lord, for the preservation of his life. He wrote and placed it in *E-sida*, the temple of *Nebo* in Borsippa.

The fourth tablet thus describes the combat between *Marduk*, the god of light, and *Tiamat*. She was slain and her allies put in bondage, while the “ books of fate,” hitherto in the hands of these foes, were now transferred to the younger deities of the new world, who on the new year's day assembled, under the presidency of *Marduk*, in the hall of fate, to determine the lots to king and country for the coming year. *Marduk* formed the visible heavens out of the skin of *Tiamat*, and it became the habitation of *Anu*, *Bêl*, and *Ea*, the chief triad of gods in the Babylonian pantheon.

The heavens having thus been made, the fifth tablet describes how they were furnished with mansions (*i. e.*, constellations ?) for the several heavenly bodies, and how these bodies were bound by fixed laws that they might regulate the calendar and determine the year. Of this tablet only twenty-four lines have been preserved. It begins as follows :

1. He (*i. e.*, *Marduk*) established the mansions of the great gods.  
The stars, corresponding to them, he fixed, and the annual constellations  
He determined (the length of) the year, (its) limits he defined.  
(For) each of the twelve months three stars he fixed,
5. From the time when the year opens in fixed limits.  
He founded the mansion of Jupiter, to mark their bounds.  
That none (of the days) might deviate, nor be found lacking.  
The mansion of *Bêl* and *Ea* (*i. e.*, the north pole and the south pole) he  
established with him (*i. e.*, with Jupiter).  
He opened gates at both sides.
10. And forced open the bolts on the left and the right.  
In the very midst he made the morning firmament (or the zenith ?).  
He made the moon-god (*Nannaru*) brilliant, (and) intrusted the night to  
him.

He defined him as a night-body, to mark off the days (saying):

"Monthly without ceasing define (the time) with the disc ;

15. In the beginning of the month light up in the evening,

That the horns shine to mark the heavens.

On the seventh day make half the royal cap (*i.e.*, show one-half of the disc).

On the fourteenth mayest thou mark the half of the month."

*Lines 19-24* are very mutilated, and do not admit a connected translation.

The sixth tablet may have described the creation of the beasts, vegetables, birds, and fish. Nothing, however, can be said with certainty, no fragments having thus far been discovered. In the seventh tablet, of which but few fragments are preserved, the creation of animals and vegetables is narrated, and perhaps that of mankind. The translation is as follows :

1. When the gods in their assembly had created (the beasts?),  
They prepared the mighty (monsters?).  
They created the living animals,  
The cattle of the field, the beasts of the field, and the creeping animals.
5. (They fixed the habitations) for the living animals.  
They distributed the creeping things in the field, the creeping things in the city.  
. . . . the creepers, the totality of the creation.  
[The creatures all] which in my whole family [are found?].  
. . . . .
10. The gods staggered much, at the end of their assembly.  
(*i.e.*, they were drunk, celebrating the completion of the creation).  
The rest is lost.

With this Babylonian account harmonize, in all the essential points, the records found in the History of Berossus, a priest in the temple of Bēl at Babylon in the days of Alexander the Great, who wrote a history of his country in Greek, of which fragments only have been preserved by other historians, and the account of Damascius, a pagan philosopher of the sixth century A. D.

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Besides this Babylonian account of the creation in a series of successive acts, there have been found fragments of two tablets (four columns, each numbering about twenty-eight lines) from the library of *Cutha*, now *Tel Ibrahīm*, in Babylonia. This

legend knows nothing of a creation in successive acts. "Chaos is a period when as yet writing was unknown. But the earth existed and was inhabited by the chaotic brood of *Tiamat*. They were destroyed, not by *Marduk*, the god of Babylon, but by *Nergal*, the patron deity of *Cutha* (Sayce, "Records of the Past," new series, Vol. I., 147-8).

A few years ago Mr. Theophilus G. Pinches, of the British Museum, discovered an additional version, written, unlike the others, in two languages (the non-Semitic or so-called Sumerian and the Semitic-Babylonian). The tablet numbers about forty lines on the obverse and fifteen on the reverse. "It is short to bareness, telling all it has to say in a few words. Noteworthy is the small number of deities who took part in the work. *Marduk* (Merodach) appears as a matter of course, and is spoken of as having created mankind, animals, plants, and the renowned sites wherein Babylonian civilization had its origin." ("Records of the Past," new series, Vol. VI., pp. 112-3).